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Huber's staying was mighty close

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In 1950 there came a day when Walter Huber just had to make up his mind. His job was phasing out and he had been looking. He had resigned himself to the probability of leaving the state. Then he heard about "this accounting job at a hospital" and took it.

On August 5 Huber, 68, will retire after 24 years with Tacoma General Hospital. His title is president and chief executive officer.

"It was a very close thing," Huber remembers. "I had only two weeks to go and I was all prepared to leave and this thing opened up and I just fell into it.

"I knew nothing about hospitals. I had never even been a patient in a hospital."

FOR SOMEONE WHO didn't know what he was doing, Huber has done well. Seven years after joining the hospital staff he was named administrator, then to the top job.

When Huber joined TG its assets had, just reached $1 million. Today they total $11 million. "I recall very clearly that we had $97,000 worth of accounts receivable. I probably shouldn't use this terminology but the board worried itself sick over this.

"Now we look at $3 million in accounts receivable."

THAT MONEY WORRIES Huber, both as a bookkeeper and as a man.

"I think you have to live with a hospital to learn about what it's like. It's not a matter of becoming involved with the hospital but of being absorbed by it. You have no idea how much of your life it can influence.

"I have tried to meld together the business aspects and the medical. The business side is needed. But you cannot forget the humanitarien aspect.

"We had to do this with our accounts receivable and with our collections. You know there is that great story about going to the hospital and you get well and then you get the bill and you are sick again. There is some truth in that."

Huber's solution was a social service department "where we work with people to try to solve some of their problems."

It is unusual for Huber to speak that much about anything. A short, quiet, soft-spoken man, his life has been marked more by accomplishments than headlines.

Staff photo by Bob Rudsit

Walter Huber reminisced

Although he runs a business with a $12 million annual budget and an $8 million payroll, The News Tribune file on Huber contains just five brief clippings dated between 1955 and 1966 (including one about his being named president of the state's Association of Hospital Accountants).

"I'm not a colorful person," Huber says. "I guess I have just plugged along and done what is necessary."

AMONG THE THINGS he plugged along" at was carrying out the 1960 TG building program, being chief staff officer for the present building program that will replace the hospital's medical facilities, leading the fight for safety and professional training programs that have made TG's staff one of the most expert in the state, helping set up standard accounting systems for all hospitals.

Most of this has been detailed, business-type work and Huber admits "sometimes you have to wake yourself up and remember that there are a couple of hundred sick people out there."

"I think the thing that impressed me most when I found myself in this wonderland was the approach medical people take toward patients.

"The medical gown is the guarantee of equality. The medical approach is directed toward the problem not toward the individual.

"I don't know if I'm saying this right. But you bring a guy in from off Skid Road and there are all those doctors around him, trying to help him. They are looking at how to solve the medical problem not whether this is a guy who is worth saving for the community.

"Everybody gets the same treatment. That has impressed me t e most."

WHEN HUBER—born in Chehalis and a University of Washington business administration graduate—retires he doesn't really "have any great plans." He and wife Verna "aren't much for travel." And their two sons, Robert and James are grown and on their own.

But . . .

"I think life will be interesting. I am not going vegetate. I suppose I will also find some way of being useful."